

Make these mini Jack-o'-Lantern stuffed peppers, perfect for Halloween



Jack-o'-Lantern Stuffed Peppers

Photos Susie Iventosch

By Susie Iventosch

We love a good Halloween project and this one is deliciously edible! Carve orange bell peppers with cute little pumpkin faces and then stuff them with whatever filling you like, from rice and veggies to meat and cheese. Bake them in a casserole dish until the filling is hot and serve for a great weekday meal. It's a good dish to serve the kids before they head out to enjoy a whole bag of sweet treats on Halloween night.

We really love wild rice and it goes so well with arugula, shallots, goat cheese, Parmesan, mushrooms and the peppers to make a great vegetarian filling. But if you want to add meat to this mixture, that would be delicious too, or come up with your own ideas, which might include tomatoes, ground meat, cheese and spices. Make your own vegetarian or meat filling to cater to your family's tastes. You can also easily vary the cheeses used in this recipe by using cream cheese, or grated cheddar or even mixed Mexican

cheese. The wheat germ crust would be good on both meatless and meat filling. This crust is from The Vegetarian Epicure's recipe for Baked Stuffed Eggplant and it is fabulous. We love it all by itself, but it's wonderful as a crust topping for baked dishes like this!

Wild rice is one of our favorite foods, because it's kind of fancy and it has a nutty flavor, but it's also really good for the body. Not actually rice at all, but rather unrefined seeds from marsh grasses that are grain-free, wild rice is full of antioxidants and high in fiber, which is great for the digestive system as well as the heart. And if all that isn't enough, it's got the best bite when cooked al dente. It's delicious in stuffings, soups and pilafs.

Plan to carve the peppers before you cut the tops. The structure of the pepper is much stronger when it is whole, and that helps when cutting out their little faces! After you've created your face, then you can cut the top off the pepper and scoop out the seeds and the pith before filling them.



INGREDIENTS

(Serves 4)

Bell Peppers

- 4 orange bell peppers (They need to be orange for this recipe!)
- 2 tbsp. olive oil
- 2 shallots, or one small onion, chopped
- 2 cups cooked wild rice
- 3 oz. goat cheese, softened to room temp
- 2 cups arugula leaves
- 6 whole cremini mushrooms, sliced
- 1 large egg, beaten (This is optional, but holds the filling together a bit better than without the egg)
- 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 tsp. lemon pepper
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1/2 tsp. ground pepper

Wheat Germ Crust Topping (From The Vegetarian Epicure)

- 1 cup toasted walnuts and/or pecans, chopped
- 1/2 cup wheat germ
- 3/4 cup grated Parmesan
- 2 tbsp. melted butter
- 1/2 cup half and half

INSTRUCTIONS

Stuffed Bell Peppers

Spray an 8x8 baking dish with cooking spray. Preheat oven to 350 F.

While still whole with stem intact, carve the eyes and mouth of your Jack-o'-Lantern on each bell pepper. Then slice off the top keeping the stem intact. Remove any seeds and white pith from the inside of the pepper and finish punching out any of your carvings that didn't come loose from the outside. Don't worry if the stem falls away from the top, you can just rest it on top when baking and no one will ever know the difference!

Heat oil in skillet and sauté shallots over medium heat until translucent. Add mushrooms and continue to cook for five minutes longer. Set aside.

Meanwhile, cook wild rice according to instructions. When cooked, mix with all of the remaining pepper stuffing ingredients: sautéed mushrooms and shallots, arugula leaves, goat cheese, egg, Parmesan, lemon pepper, salt and pepper. Mix well.

Stuff the carved bell peppers with the wild rice filling.

Wheat Germ Crust Topping

Melt butter and mix with all of the remaining ingredients.

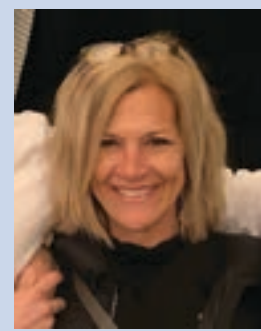
Distribute the topping evenly amongst the four bell peppers and spread out over the top of the rice filling.

Replace pepper cap with stem onto each pepper and arrange stuffed peppers into the prepared baking dish. Cover with foil.

Bake, covered, at 350 F for 25 minutes. Remove foil and bake for another 10 minutes uncovered.

Serve hot.

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Family Focus

Issues for grandparents and their adult children

By Margie Ryerson, MFT

"Young people need something stable to hang on to — a culture connection, a sense of their own past, a hope for their own future. Most of all, they need what grandparents can give them...."

~ Jay Kesler

"Grandparents, like heroes, are as necessary to a child's growth as vitamins."

~ Joyce Allston

If you are fortunate enough to be a grandparent, you know what a special position you hold. And how you have even more people in your life to love and nurture. But what if you don't feel very appreciated for all of your efforts and caring? Or, worse, what if you feel criticized when you are only trying to help? Sadly, some grandparents experience hurt from their children and their children's partners, the parents of their beloved grandchildren.

"Melanie" and "David" zoomed with me to discuss ways to cope with their difficult family situation. They have two grandchildren, ages 2 and 5, and their son and daughter-in-law live an hour away. Melanie always thought that when her only child, her son, had a family of his own, she would be closely involved in helping with the children. She has offered to babysit, but her offer has never been accepted. Yet her daughter-in-law's mother, who

lives nearby the family, babysits frequently. Melanie and David see the grandchildren for birthdays and holidays, and the little ones always seem to enjoy being with them. They have asked their son if there is anything they are doing that bothers "Gabby," their daughter-in-law, and he reassures them that nothing is wrong. It is hard and hurtful for Melanie and David to have such limited access to their grandchildren, and they feel powerless to change the situation.

Frequently, as in the case of Melanie and David's family, no one will discuss underlying issues that have led to some degree of estrangement. And sadly, grandparents have no way of knowing how to remedy the situation.

Another set of grandparents, Mitch and Sue, decided to take it upon themselves to propose visiting their son and daughter-in-law and family in another state rather than wait for an invitation that never seemed to come. Several times now they have said they would be in the area and would like to visit. They have never been invited to stay in their son's house, although relatives on his wife's side have been welcome to stay with them. They know they will stay in a nearby hotel, clear their plans with their son and family ahead of time, and limit their stay to just a few days. They are careful to accept

any limits their son and daughter-in-law present and to speak and behave in only positive ways. It has been hurtful and hard to be treated like distant relatives who aren't really welcome.

Both sets of grandparents had a good relationship with their sons when they were growing up. Although it's been mystifying as to why they are now deemed to be peripheral people in their sons' lives, each couple knows that their best course of action is to wait and be patient. They tried early on to find out what they could do to improve the relationships, but once they were told that "there was nothing wrong," they knew not to keep inquiring. If they speak up too often or forcefully, they could risk jeopardizing what little relationship they still have.

Too often the reasons behind this kind of shabby treatment are not rational and reasonable. Some friends who considered themselves loving and generous with their adult children and little grandson were criticized by their son-in-law for not contributing enough each month to their grandson's 529 college fund. The son-in-law is from an extremely wealthy family who are able to contribute large sums of money to the fund, whereas our friends give what they can afford. Sadly, this issue has interfered with our friends' ability to see

their grandson as often as they would like. And of course, the grandchildren in these situations are also the ones who are missing out on these valuable relationships with their grandparents.

Many people have unresolved issues with a number of things in their lives. Sometimes they project their dissatisfaction with their work or their relationships onto others. Parents of adult children and their partners can be the unfortunate recipients of various resentments and judgments that are not really warranted. And because some adult children don't examine their own issues and address them in constructive ways, they can be quick to find fault with others.

If you are among the grandparents who are not being treated fairly and respectfully, there are important steps you can take for yourselves. You can continue to be respectful of your grandchildren's parents by asking permission before sending gifts and also by asking for gift suggestions. You can exhibit patience and willingness to take direction from them when it comes to interacting with your grandchildren. You want to be sure you comply with the parents, especially if they are sticklers about things like food, screen time, etc.

In addition, you can work with a family therapist on your own and include your adult

children in sessions if they are willing. Many adult children appreciate their parents' willingness to be responsive to them and accepting of their viewpoints. If your adult children are unwilling to participate, it is especially important for you to find support for your understandable hurt and frustration. Books, such as "Rules of Estrangement: Why Adult Children Cut Ties and How to Heal the Conflict" by Joshua Coleman, PhD., can help and so can sharing your pain with trusted friends and family. And as always, don't hesitate to talk to a professional if you are experiencing unhappiness from this kind of heartache.



Margie Ryerson, MFT, is a local marriage and family therapist. Contact her at 925-376-9323 or margierye@yahoo.com. Her books, Family Focus: A Therapist's Tips for Happier Families, Treat Your Partner Like a Dog: How to Breed a Better Relationship, and Appetite for Life: Stories of Recovery from Anorexia, Bulimia and Compulsive Overeating are available on Amazon.com.

Worsley returns to Cal Shakes as executive director

Submitted by Kevin Kopjak

California Shakespeare Theater's board of directors announced Oct. 4 that Managing Director Sarah Williams will depart the Bay Area nonprofit theater organization following three years at the helm. Veteran arts leader, actor, and advocate Clive Worsley has been named to the newly created position of Executive Director. As part of a comprehensive

reimagining of the organization, Worsley will take up the newly created Executive Director role, which will oversee and direct the strategic vision of the organization.

"Our board knew we were dealing with change taking place on many levels at once: In the theater, in the performing arts, in the community, and on the land," said Betsy Streeter, Cal Shakes Board Secretary and leader of the transition team. "We

knew that no matter what happened, we wanted our work to reflect and extend the purpose and values that Cal Shakes has long embraced. Clive embodies these principles personally, in the community, and in his past work at Cal Shakes leading Artistic Learning, which makes him the ideal choice to come in and have an immediate impact."

Worsley has been a leader in Bay Area performing arts nonprofits as

an artist, educator, and administrator for over 30 years. From 2013-2021, Worsley served as Director of Artistic Learning and expanded the reach of arts education to communities around the San Francisco Bay Area. Worsley served as Artistic Director of Town Hall Theatre in Lafayette from 2008-2013, where he cultivated greater integration of the Main Stage and Educational Programs, including a shadow cast program for

teen actors. Under his direction, Town Hall built new community partnerships, recovered from a devastating flood, achieved financial solvency, and received numerous Shellie Awards.

"I'm delighted and honored to be back at Cal Shakes, and to help shape the next phase of this vital community resource," said Worsley. "As we steward Cal Shakes into the future, I'm grateful to the Board, leadership team,



Photo courtesy Cal Shakes

Clive Worsley

and staff who have worked tirelessly to support and advance the mission of the organization."